IDEAS

Mar. 2 - 23,1983

~~4-ID-025~~

THE WORLD OF THE CHILD

CBC Transcripts, P.O. Box 6440, Station A, Montreal, Quebec H3C 3L4

Kevin Marsh
Good evening, I'm Kevin Marsh and this is Ideas. Of all the things which make us human, our long childhood is the most distinctive. Through prolonged dependency, we become adaptable, and this adaptation — to a particular mother, to a particular family, to a particular culture — begins virtually from conception. But with dependency goes vulnerability, and so the world too must adapt to the needs of its children.

Tonight on Ideas, we begin a new four-part series entitled The World of the Child, in which we examine the way in which our children are adapting to their world, and the way our world is adapting to its children. The series is presented by David Cayley.

Music: sur le pont d'aviqnon. . .

David Cayley
The old bridge at Avignon dates from the 14th century, and this song preserves the impressions of children watching a festival honouring the patron saint of the bridge. The soldiers bow like this. And then again — like this. And the children watch, an accepted part of their world: observing, imitating. In the medieval world, the lives of children were often harsh, but they did mix freely in adult society. Today the world has grown complex and inaccessible to children and although their lives are easier, they spend much of them in separate institutions, cut off from the adult world.

Yet according to Neil Postman, a professor of media ecology at New York University, it is the separation and protection of children that defines the very idea of childhood.

Neil Postman
The main difference between a child and an adult is that an adult is in possession of certain secrets that are not considered suitable for children to know. These are sexual secrets, political secrets, social secrets, medical secrets and the like. The process of socialization has involved adults gradually 'in stages' revealing these secrets to the young in psychologically assimilable ways. When the young know all the secrets, they are in theory adults.

David Cayley
Childhood, in other words, is a condition of innocence, defined in its literal sense of not knowing. And it is Postman's opinion, expressed in a book he published last year called The Disappearance of Childhood, that pervasive exposure to television is now destroying that innocence.

Neil Postman
Television makes hash of this whole process because it reveals to everyone in the culture simultaneously all of the cultural secrets. So that at any given time, a 3 year-old, an 11 year-old, a 30 year-old and a 72 year-old are watching the same material on television. So TV, because of its instantaneity, because of its simultaneity, because of its inability to segregate audiences, therefore eliminates the idea of having a special category of people, children, who are in need of protection and nurturing and who are in particular to be protected against knowing too early some of the things that adults know. Because this process is well under way, it seems to me that the idea of childhood is being rapidly eroded.

David Cayley
Postman's concern about television eroding the idea of childhood is consonant with a principle expressed to me by Neil Sutherland of the Faculty of Education at the University of British Columbia. In a book called The Children of English Canada, Sutherland has studied the debates about children in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, a period during which he believes our current consensus on childhood was developed. He argues that whenever society is seen as changing, or in need of change, child rearing becomes an issue.

Neil Sutherland
The new kind of world demands a new kind of socialization, and you can find examples both economic and spiritual and so on at various points in time in history. And I think that's where children come to the fore, is at points where we're changing from one kind of a world to another. One thinks about them — they come to the forefront of consciousness rather than being there all the time. I make the point about the difference between the 1870s and 1890s. For the vast majority of children, over 99 per cent, there was no difference in their lives in 1870 and in 1890. The difference is: in society in the 1870s nobody's talking about kids, either. In the 1890s everybody's suddenly interested in kids because they're concerned about what the shape of the new world is going to be, and maybe they'd better change — better do something

about their child rearing practices.

David Cayley
Neil Sutherland does not himself feel that what he calls the 20th century consensus on children is now breaking down. Neil Postman obviously disagrees, and here he summarizes the evidence for his view that childhood is disappearing.

Neil Postman
For example, we see now that among the highest paid models in America now are 12 and 13 year-old girls. There are some people who have already forgotten that to present a 12 year-old girl in public display as an erotic object was considered to be psychopathic only maybe 15 years ago. Nowadays it's normal fare on television. Let's take another example: crime. Fifteen and 20 years ago there was something called "a juvenile delinquent." I wonder if anyone remembers a juvenile delinquent. There were such things as a criminal code for children. In other words, children were not to suffer the same penalties as adults for crime. The reason was that 20 years ago children by and large did not commit the same crimes as adults. All of this is changed now. In the States between 1950 and 1979, the increase in serious crime among the under 15 year-old population exceeds 11,000 per cent. Now, this is serious crime as defined by the FBI, which is murder, rape, kidnapping and so on. So what we see is that the distinction between child crime and adult crime is rapidly being eroded. Let's take other example: diseases, for instance. Twenty-five years ago, alcoholism was regarded as strictly an adult affliction. No one ever heard of a 12 year-old alcoholic. This is changed now --alcoholism among the young is quite common, as are drug addiction and venereal disease. In other words, the diseases that children are now afflicted with are the same sorts of diseases that adults are afflicted with. Let's take other examples: games. Does anyone remember when there was a very rich and varied repertoire of things known as children's games? These are rapidly disappearing and being replaced by sports such as little league baseball or peewee football, that are modelled entirely on adult big league sports. They're modelled in their rules, in the context in which they're played, in their emotional style and so on.

David Cayley
The evidence which Neil Postman presents is of course largely American. But he believes (and I think he is right) that what he is describing is common, at least in some degree, to all industrialized countries. His point is underlined by the observations of David Elkind, the chairman of the department of child study at Tufts University.

David Elkind
What we're seeing today -- I think one of the most frightening things that we're seeing, as I travel around -- I've already reported some of the statistics for adolescents which are doubling and tripling suicide rates, drug abuse rates and so on. What we're seeing in children today is depression, more and more, which we didn't see in kids before. I have even written about the fact that I didn't believe depression could occur in children because I thought it was cognitively impossible. But what we're seeing is 5 and 6 year-old kids who are not just unhappy, but depressed. Low mood, low self-concept, apathetic and so on. Depression in childhood is becoming a very serious syndrome.

Washington now is setting up conferences for affective disorders in children, Boston is having a conference on affective disorders in young children in a few weeks. To me, that again is a symptom of the stress that young kids are under today; that you're seeing so much depression, you're seeing all the other psychosomatic symptoms of headache, stomach ache, all of the things we know accompanying stress in kids. We know that now we're seeing hypertensive kids and so on. So yes, we're seeing a lot of sick kids. I was in New Hampshire recently in a small high school, 400 kids in a rural and bucolic environment, with every house having a couple of acres and farms. You'd think these kids are going to be great. Fifty per cent of the kids in high school have alcohol problems.

David Cayley
The things that David Elkind and Neil Postman are describing are undeniably real and acutely disturbing. Their meaning is harder to pin down. Is childhood disappearing, as Postman supposes? Or is it possible he is observing the painful side effects of an evolutionary upheaval which may also be producing beneficial effects in the lives of some children. To try and answer these questions, I want to delve a little into the history of childhood in order to see whether we can discover there a pattern of change which sheds light on the lives of children today.

In a paper published last year in the Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology, Professor John Lee of Scarborough College suggests that three distinct views of children can be detected in western history. Children have been seen first as property, then as dependents in need of protection and regulation, and finally as persons. What is now passing away in Professor Lee's view is not childhood as such, but rather the idea of children as innocents in need of protection from adult realities. But first, let's turn to the idea of children as property.

John Lee
Children were lumped together with pets, slaves, women and furniture, and draught horses and oxen, as possessions of the familias — the very word 'family' comes from the old Greek word household, meaning all of the property of the head of the household, who of course was the patriarch — the eldest man — and included often sons that were themselves full grown adults and their servants, and so on. And in that context, children were simply a piece of the furniture, if you like, to be disposed of at pleasure. If you wanted to sell the child, if you wanted to abandon it the way you would a misshapen calf that was born, then that was your pleasure.

David Cayley
The idea of children as property is still present in residual forms today. But in pre-Reformation Europe, when this view was universal, childhood as a separate stage of life apparently did not exist. The idea that childhood as a separate status is a social invention of modern Europe was first broached by the French historian, Philippe Ariez in his book Centuries of Childhood, published in 1960. He deduced it from the representation of children as miniature adults in the art and iconography of medieval Europe, and the idea has since received quite general acceptance by historians.

Neil Postman
There were apparently two stages of life: infancy and adulthood. And infancy seemed to end at about the age of 7, which is the age of course when children have more or less mastered oral language. After the age of 7, a child — or what we would call a child — in the medieval world became more or less an instant miniature adult. With the exception of making war and making love, there were no distinctions made between the young and the adult in the medieval world.

David Cayley
Jerome Kagan, professor of developmental psychology at Harvard University.

Jerome Kagan
Somewhere in the middle of the 17th century, 1650 — around then, you see a watershed. And you summarize the change in this way. One, we now have a larger group of middle class mothers who don't have to work, don't have to gather berries or sew. They're not hunter-gatherers any more and they're not necessarily out in large agricultural areas with so much work to do, with a lot of chores. They're comfortable, they're burghers, and therefore they can become much more identified and sentimentally attached to their children. Second, the children of these middle class city families — they are no more economic necessities because you don't have a farm. Rural families need children to do the agricultural work — your children are plough horses, they're economic necessities for you. If you're a middle class bourgeois in Lyons or London, you don't need your children. Now, notice what that does: now your child changes its function. You child now can bring you enhanced status by rising in the artificial status hierarchy of the society rather than helping you plant corn. So the child is now a much more sentimental object, you're identified with its successes, and you have a status system.

Before that time when there's less social mobility, you don't worry about your child's future, because if you're a blacksmith your kid's going to be a blacksmith, and if you're nobility the kid will be nobility. There's no chance of a blacksmith's child becoming nobility. If there's no social mobility then you're not worried about what your child will become — you know what your child will become. He will be you. Once you break down those barriers and you create uncertainty about the future, then you're the son of a burgher and a burgher's wife, it's not certain what you'll become.

Now you worry about your children. And now you need a theory to reduce your uncertainty. You don't want to have parents worrying, and so you create a theory which emphasizes the importance of what parents do to children. Also what you want to build into this child is an achievement motivation rather than an obedience motivation. If you're a rural family in the 15th century, you want to train piety and

obedience; if you're sitting in the city, and you want your child to rise in the hierarchy, then you want a child who is less obedient and more autonomous. And I think there's a sentimental phenomenology that might say, "Well, then my child should be confident. I want a self-confident child." Then you begin to praise you child and punish him less. You don't want him frightened of you — otherwise you know that if he's frightened of you, he'll be frightened of other people. So you start treating him more gently, you start to identify with him.

And now because the mother is there most of the time, it's easy therefore to say that most of what happens must be a function of what the mother does, because she's around the child much more. The older sisters and grandmothers aren't taking care of the child. And so the change we get, the movement toward the modern family, which you see reaching its crest in the 20th century here in North America where you say: "This baby is a loving, affectionate organism, the mother is primarily responsible for whether it becomes a Nobel laureate or a criminal, and it needs love. It needs love." And that conception begins its story line in the middle of the 17th century.

David Cayley
Jerome Kagan, I think properly, emphasizes the social and economic foundations of our idea of childhood. But in this statement, whether he quite intended it or not, I think he somewhat overstates the cause and effect relationship between changing socio-economic conditions and our contemporary beliefs about the importance of early experience. Certainly it was changing socio-economic conditions which made this idea for the first time possible and practical. But this does not necessarily make the idea a pure invention. We could equally well say that changing conditions made possible the discovery of the importance of early experience, which had been previously overlooked. This idea of childhood as a discovery rather than an invention is certainly a possible interpretation of Neil Postman's thesis that it was the invention of the printing press which established the conditions for the emergence of childhood as a separate status.

Neil Postman
Before the printing press, one simply became an adult by learning how to speak, for which all people are biologically programmed. After the printing press, you could only become an adult by learning how to be literate, for which all people are not biologically programmed. Now what this meant was that schools, or what we call schools, had to be established. And in the late 16th and early 17th century for the first time the young — that is 4, 5, 6, 7 year-olds — were separated from the rest of the adult community and placed in these peculiar places we call schools, where they were to be instructed and disciplined in the ways of literacy.

Now, you know it's a fundamental sociological principle that if you separate a group, any group, for a single purpose — in this case teaching them how to read and write — eventually people will perceive this group to be unusual in other respects as well. And this is exactly what happened here. As soon as the young were pulled out of the adult community to become schoolboys and schoolgirls in order to become literate, it was inevitably noticed that they were different in all sorts of other ways. And therefore they began to be required to dress differently and to play differently, and it was assumed that they thought differently. There were all sorts of changes as a result of the development of schools.

And so from that point onward, different European cultures began to pay attention in an entirely different way to this age group, and began to assign to them a preferred status — began to think of them not as miniature adults, but as unformed adults, which is altogether different. If one reads John Locke, for example, you can see that his entire conception of a child is that a child is an unformed adult, someone still on the way to becoming an adult. And he makes it very clear that what a child has to do to become an adult is not just learn how to read and write — that's the key thing — but to learn how to discipline his mind, to learn how to control his body, to learn how to control his passions and instincts — all of the things that the schools committed themselves to do, and to some extent are still committed to do.

David Cayley
In the tradition of Harold Innes and Marshall McLuhan, Neil Postman believes that it is the communications conditions within a culture which shape both how people think and what they pay attention to. When print becomes the dominant medium of communication, people begin to notice childhood — it becomes a

dominant social idea. And beause this idea persists through all sorts of economic changes, it follows for Postman that it must have some more fundamental basis than simply economics.

Nevertheless, childhood does initially emerge as both a class and sex-based idea. The first modern children were the sons of the European bourgeosie. Only later, and very gradually, were the privileges of this status extended to daughters and to rural and working class children. And there is the additional complicating factor that children themselves became, in some sense, a class in their own right. In the 18th century, for example, both servants and workers could properly be addressed by their masters as "child", indicating that the emergence of childhood in the middle class involved the infantalization of the working poor.

In rural Canada, the emergence of childhood as a separate and protected status didn't really take place until the latter part of the 19th century.

Neil Sutherland

For rural Canada, it's somewhere between the 1870s and the 1890s that modernization begins to have an effect. Up until that time, the childhood of a child, say in rural Ontario in the 1870s, was not very different from a childhood in rural French Canada in the 1670s. For most people, I think, in a society where nearly everybody had to work all the time, there was not the leisure or the luxury to be able to enjoy childhood. And those kinds of things that we like about children now, as children, were things that one wanted to get children through as quickly as possible, if one wanted to get them into the work force so that they could help the family survive. And so those kinds of things that we value they didn't value very much. Middle class parents did, and that's why we're often misled by literary sources, because it's mostly middle and upper class people who write memoirs, and they did indeed cherish at least some parts of those kinds of childhood. But for most of the people, up until the 1870s and 1880s where the kids started working and contributing their share to the family survival, we just needed those kids. And the kinds of characteristics they had that made them child-like were not the kind of characteristics which made for good family workers.

David Cayley

Gender, class and geography — all affected the timing of the emergence of childhood. But eventually it became a universal condition in all industrialized societies. Professor John Lee of Scarborough College has summarized this condition as what he calls "the protection paradigm" -- the second of his three paradigms of childhood. By the term paradigm, he refers basically to those mental models which we use to make sense of our experience, and which we often mistake for reality itself.

John Lee

There are a number of changes that come at about the same time. The increase in population density in Europe in particular, the emergence of industrial technology, the emergence of the modern city, concepts of capitalist relationships and so on, which changed the nature of labour etc. So that to some extent children become less valuable as pieces of property. They become a liability rather than an asset even on the farm, and certainly in the city. You have the notion that the child is something to be enjoyed; rather in the way there is a shift from crafts to arts, for example, in the Renaissance. You know, the ideas here — I'm not saying are brand new — Aristotle said that a gentleman is a person who enjoys useless things more than useful things, and that's ancient Greece. But the notion that one could live a life style in which useless things were more valuable to your life style than the useful artifacts, whether they're pieces of art on the wall or pieces of furnishing -- or children — is something that was possible with the industrial revolution with mass techniques of production, cheap goods, international trade, imperialism, etc.

So children have become a useless pleasure, if you like, for adults, like a piece of art. And the protection paradigm is really a way of saying, "I want to shape this possession of mine in a way which will reflect my tastes, my view of the world, my religion, my career goals, in the same way as I might choose my household surroundings, my art purchases, my educational investments, and so on, to reflect this sense of a calling. The Reformation is certainly part of this too — a particular calling in life.

You see there's a terrific shift which goes with the Renaissance, the Reformation, the industrial revolution and so on, away from the idea that this life is a mere passing phase in which if we are good, we will be rewarded in heaven, to the Calvinist/Lutheran notion of this life being

important and success in this life being important. So children as children then become something to be protected from the corruption of the adult world until they're ready for it, but at the same time, a very important investment which adults make in their own future.

David Cayley
The idea that children ought to be protected from the corruption of adult social life created an expanding role for the state in the lives of children. Middle class reformers of the 19th century argued that the welfare of society and the manageability of the working class, by which they often meant the same thing, depended on the intervention of the state in the lives of children. Egerton Ryerson, who played such a major role in shaping Ontario's school system, declared that the state should be, as he said, "a collective parent "to the children of its citizens.

John Lee
The state became the most suitable instrument by which people who were interested in protecting children — first of all, protecting children from their own parents and other adults. Protecting them from uncontrolled experience of their peers —that is, policing the childhood culture. You see, there's a very interesting culture which most adults have forgotten of things which children teach to other children. You have probably never taught your children marbles or bottle caps, or what have you. These things are taught by slightly older children to slightly younger ones. And most of these childhood cultural items need to be policed, need to be absorbed into classroom, picture books, and teachers setting agendas for their learning so that the child will not be free to absorb whatever the child wants to grow in the way that a plant put in the ground and left to itself —what we call a weed — would take over what it needs from the environment, and expand accordingly. We're converting the "weeds" of childhood into cultivars, and the state is the gardener in this case, because of course the modern state has the greatest resources to finance education, to finance probation, reform schools, mass textbooks, ministries of education and so on.

Lloyd de Mause
I started my research with a moment of delusion that maybe Freud was right. I'm a Freudian-trained psychoanalyst, and Freud said after all that the more civilized you become, the more repressed you become. So I figured well, if you go back in history, you should find unrepressed, nice, healthy people, right? And I was astonished to find just the opposite.

David Cayley
This is Lloyd de Mause, the director of the Institute for Psychohistory in New York, the founding editor of now called The History of Childhood **Quarterly** now called The Journal of Psychohistory, and the author of several books which touch on the history of childhood. In 1974, de Mause published an essay entitled "The Evolution of Childhood," in which he took issue with much of the conventional wisdom on the subject. "The history of childhood," he wrote in the opening passage of this essay, "is a nightmare, from which mankind has only recently begun to awaken. The further back in history one goes, the more archaic the mode of parenting, and the more likely children are to be routinely abandoned, killed, beaten, emotionally and physically starved, and sexually molested." In de Mause's view, child rearing evolves through a series of modes or stages, culminating only in recent times, and even then only rarely, in what he calls the empathic or helping mode of parental behaviour. In what follows, he is responding to my request for a precis of his theory.

Lloyd de Mause
There was a time when everybody on this earth was infanticidal. You go back to antiquity, and you find that about one out of two children, for instance, were literally killed at birth, with little guilt. And only very slowly does this change. When the Christians first came into Rome, one guy said, "You know these Christians? Well, they pretty much dress the same as we do, and eat the same things we do, but they've got a weird idea —they don't think that they should kill their newborn. Very strange people." And slowly this penetrated the consciousness of western Europe, at least, and rather than infanticiding your newborn, you merely sent him off perhaps to a monastery and abandoned them, either physically or emotionally, or to a wet nurse, or to a foster home, or various other ways. Back in history, during the Middle Ages, people would, for instance, in a country as advanced as France or England regularly send all their children away at the age of 7 to other homes, and bring other children into their homes as servants as apprentices or whatever. And this kind of continuous over and over abandonment by their parents has an enormously destructive

effect on your trust in the world.

By the time you got to the modern age in the 1600-1700s, the family in at least some portion of society was somewhat more stable. Mothers even nursed their own kids rather than sending them out to wet nurses. They were then more close to their children, and were able to give them somewhat more trust in the world, but they very much had to control them. That Puritan mother that says, "You are evil and I must pray with you for two hours a day to show how much badness you have in you" to this little two or three-year-old kid, is a very intrusive, over-controlling mother who is trying to offset the fear she has of the child who is somewhat closer to her and whom she's not sending off to a wet nurse.

And then slowly but surely by the time you get to the 18th-19th century, you get what I actually term the 'socializing mode' that is somewhat more common today, of your neighbours and so on. And I think perhaps by the time you get the Spock generation in America here, you get what you might term the 'helping mode,' in which you're not essentially socializing the child as a way of forming a lump of clay into what you want to make it, but rather are giving some sense to what the child wants, and to what the child's image of himself is, and what the child's individuation might be, and just simply helping them become what they want to be. This, in a quick run-down, is 3,000 years of childhood history. But the essence of the picture when you finish up is that these five or six modes of child rearing of the past are still present with us, fossilized if you will, in the psycho-classes of the society around us.

David Cayley

de Mause's theory, naturally, has had its critics. And most of them have stressed the inapplicability of modern psychoanalytic ideas to people living in times very different than our own. To this de Mause has responded, I think quite tellingly that if people want to believe that children once accepted or enjoyed the kind of abandonment and abuse which he has found in the historical record, then that is their business. The essence of his theory is that "psychic structure," as he has written, "must always be passed from generation to generation through the narrow funnel of childhood." And for this reason, he views the encounter between parent and child as the fundamental locus of historical change.

Lloyd de Mause

Well, what you have to imagine is every society as a yeast of wishes to relate to their children in some way better than their parents did. Long before there were books on child rearing or Dr. Spocks, or therapy, every parent tried a second time around to regress to the child's age, imagine its needs, and then do it better than was done at that age in their own family of origin. And in a sense, that's something like what we've discovered in therapy. After all, therapy is merely a second time around that you're visiting your childhood, and trying to undo old decisions and produce new decisions. A mother will say to her child, "If you knock that milk off the table, you will be punished by God, and you'll be dead the next moment." When that child grows up and sees a glass of milk on the table and has her own child with her, she looks at it and says, "Well, maybe I won't say 'God will kill you dead,' but I will say, 'You are bad inside of you,'" and so on and so on. And maybe after centuries of revisiting this childhood scene, eventually the mother might say, "It's just a glass of milk, that's okay. If you break it, the world hasn't ended." This is very hard to achieve. You see the mother struggling in the documents to achieve this.

One of my favourites is the Countess of Lincolnshire, about 1600, writing to other mothers and saying, "You know how all of us upper class mothers send our babies away to wet nurses? And you know how like about three-quarters of them die because the wet nurses couldn't care about their hired charges? And we get very few of them back, and when we get them back at 3 or 4, they're strangers anyway? Well, I want to tell you what I discovered. I did that for my first six kids, but my last child, I kept my baby myself. Oh yes, I know what you're going to say. Your husband will say, 'Your breast is mine! I won't share it with another baby.' But tell you husband, no, wait a minute. Let this baby suck on my breast, and watch how nice it is. The baby touches my breast and touches my face, and smiles and goos and giggles and so on. You get a great deal of pleasure out of that." Now you see this mother almost for the first time in history explaining what good parenting is to others, and struggling through family problems —what if the husband is going to be jealous, and her own fears that the baby's going to eat her up and so on the history of childhood is a series of these incidents of people

trying to stop abusing physically, sexually and emotionally their children, and each generation is, if you will, a bit of historical therapy.

David Cayley

Let me now try to summarize what we have heard so far. I can detect four reasonably distinct views on the history of childhood. One which stresses the primary importance of socio-economic factors, one which stresses media of communication, one -- de Mause's -- which stresses the relative autonomous development of child rearing modes, and one which considers the issue in terms of paradigm shifts. Obviously all these theories overlap to some extent, and while some of them claim relative completeness for themselves, I can see no fundamental reason why they should be incompatible with each other. Each adds an important dimension to our understanding of what is happening to children today, because the changes taking place in our world cut across all four domains. Psychic structure is changing, the communications environment is changing, our socio-economic organization is changing, and many have identified as well as basic paradigm shift in our philosophical conceptions. If historically our idea of childhood has been responsive to change in all four of these dimensions, then the same is likely true today.

With this in mind, I would now like to return to Neil Postman's thesis that the idea of childhood is beginning to disappear. In the first place, we should note that this idea itself developed at a very uneven pace in European history, affected different classes in different ways, and has been current in parts of Canada for less than a century, all of which suggests that this idea is as much a myth as a lived tradition. Secondly, we should observe that what is passing away is not necessarily the idea of childhood as such, but rather what John Lee calls "the protection paradigm," which construes childhood as a period of innocence in need of protection and cultivation. Thirdly, if we take seriously -- as I do -- Lloyd de Mause's idea that a more mature and more generous mode of parental behaviour develops through our history, then I think we need to consider the possibility that this evolution in parenting may be forging a new idea of childhood which is in fact more advanced and more flexible than the more formal institutionally-based version which it replaces. And finally, I think we should look at some of the limitations of the idea of childhood which stresses innocence, protection and graduated access to the world of adults.

For this I would like to bring in John Holt. In a book called Escape from Childhood, Holt defines conventional childhood as a walled garden in order to stress that what keeps the world out also keeps children in.

John Holt

A great many of the people who make their livings and their careers out of being child specialists defend their work by saying they are 'child protectors.' And I think they're sincere enough in this, I don't mean to imply a hypocrisy or villainy. The idea that all of these people had in mind was that the adult world is a kind of cold, harsh, terrible place from which children should be protected. We have here also a kind of sentimentalized notion of children as happy, carefree people without a worry on their minds, and no idea of what's going on around them, so we must preserve for them this little Garden of Eden. That's the idea. But the trouble with this is that those adults who feel themselves in the real world and not liking it very much, feeling rather hemmed in and oppressed by it, feel a great deal of resentment about their children not having to face what they face. So having created this space for children as a Garden, they then proceed to fill it full of barbed wire and broken bottles, and various other kinds of hazards, at the end of which, the special world of children is on the whole a great deal less attractive than the world of adults from which we were supposedly protecting them.

Now this world is constructed of a mixture of law, custom, institutions. School is a large part of it. The State of Indiana in this country has a law --and there are probably many comparable laws --which says that any child under the age of 16 or so, who is on the streets during school hours and not in the company of an adult, can be picked up by the police, and taken to a school or some kind of custodial institution until the parents can be found and the child turned over to them.

So these child enclosures, these child pens, which started as a supposed 'Garden', have in turn become essentialy day prisons. What we're concerned about much more is to protect society from children. And our press is full of news stories about such and such a school district cracking down on truancy because they fear,

probably with good reason, that a lot of the older children are committing various kinds of crimes during the day time. So they will say, "after the police in such and such a community" — there was one in San Diego quite recently —"conducted a big sweep, and got all the children back in school, burglaries dropped 12 per cent and car thefts dropped 17 per cent," and this kind of statistics. So what we've come up with really is the idea that children are kind of a dangerous animal that ought not to be allowed to run around loose for the protection of the rest of us. Very peculiar turn around.

David Cayley
Because of his feeling that schools protect society from children as much as they protect children from society, John Holt has become a proponent of home-based education and has written about it in a recently published book called Teach Your Own.

John Holt
I've talked to a great many educators about home schooling, home-based education in this country, Canada and other countries, and I'm always asked the question about the social life. And one of the things I've said very often in reply and say in Teach Your Own is that the social life of almost all schools, and certainly almost all large schools, is full of snobbery, conformism, ruthlessness, heartlessness, bullying, teasing, humiliation, pecking orders, and so forth. And nobody contradicts me. I have said this in the face to face presence at meetings of probably over 10,000 educators, and I can't think of more than one or two who have ever contradicted me. And what they say is, "But that's what the real world is like." So a strange ideology has grown up mostly in the last 25 years — I don't think you would have heard that even in the early years after World War II -- a strange ideology has grown up that the world is a really terrible, ruthless, heartless, cold, cruel kind of a place, and that we have to get children ready for that world basically by making school into the same kind of a place.

David Cayley
What John Holt says here amplifies a point introduced earlier by Lloyd de Mause. Adults are often extremely ambivalent towards children, and our sentimentality towards them often turns into resentment and abuse. The protection paradigm in this sense often casts rather a long shadow. And I think that John Holt, Lloyd de Mause and John Lee, each in their different ways, are right in seeing it as something to be transcended. On the other hand, I think we also need to recognize the protection of childhood as an important historical achievement. And here I think we can see the strength of Neil Postman and David Elkind's work. It is Elkind's opinion that in relation to children, we are now witnessing a kind of abdication of adult authority. Feeling helpless and child-like ourselves, he says, we project our repressed adulthood onto children, thereby forcing them in turn to repress their dependency needs. The results are often calamitous.

David Elkind
Jung used to say that we have a shadow and that we always project our shadow, and what we've had to repress is our sense of being able to cope. Then we project it onto children, and we say children are the ones who can cope. It's a little bit like what we did in the puritanical times when we repressed all our sexuality and sensuality — then it was projected on the children, and children became very sensual beings, and the sensuality had to be pushed out of them and so on. I think we've repressed today a lot of our adult authority for a variety of reasons — because it's too scary, because we can't do it, because we can't handle it, and therefore we project it onto children. And I think this need to see children as adult-like reflects the adult's view of himself or herself as the child, and the repression really of adult authority. And why that's come about is partly because of the psychological ethos, you know, 'do you own thing,' 'be your own person,' 'you're responsible only to yourself,' 'let everybody else do their own thing,' and so on, which is again a child-like orientation, not an adult social orientation in which we are all responsible for everybody else.

But that orientation has been promulgated in this society by the psychologists and in some ways abetted by the educational system which has focussed upon socialization to the exclusion of individualization. So that psychology and education should help promote both the individual and social values, but it's become very focussed upon promoting and teaching kids to be part of the society — little widgets, everybody has to be at the same level at the same time, little bottles that you fill up. And as education has become more sort of standardized,

socialized, then psychologies and psychiatries have begun to treat the individual and to provide people avenues for individualization. So you have a bifurcation in society between the two institutions, and I think it's tearing people apart.

David Cayley
According to David Elkind, the adult world has simply become too shaky and too confused to provide a secure framework in which children can really be children. And whether the cause be television or adult narcissism, I think the problem is a very real one. The ecology of adult-child relationships is visibly disintegrating. But we can really only make sense of this disintegration by comprehending its overall context. I think that we need to see ourselves as standing at a frontier. In Lloyd de Mause's terms, it is the frontier between a socializing mode of parental behaviour in which children are seen as a plastic material to be fashioned in the desired image, and a helping mode, in which parents assist children in finding their own path. In John Lee's terms, it is a frontier between the protection paradigm which still sees children as essentially owned by their parents and their society, and a model of children as persons, in which they are seen as owning themselves. On this frontier, as on any frontier, we are apt to see a lot of wild and woolly behaviour — and that is exactly what we are seeing. Development always produces reaction, and this accounts I think for much of the regressive behaviour which David Elkind and Neil Postman reported earlier in this program.

From this frontier there is really no way back. The vanished order of childhood -- half memory, half myth — is unlikely to return. Instead, I think we have to set ourselves the task of reimagining childhood according to a new set of ideals, and to this task I will try to address myself in the remaining programs of this series.

PART II

Kevin Marsh
Good evening, I'm Kevin Marsh and this is Ideas.

(Teasers)
Child's voice
Sleep baby, sleep. Thy father guards the sheep. Thy mother shakes the dreamland tree and from it falls sweet dreams for thee.

Dr. Elliot Barker
What bothers me is the confusion about recognizing your own needs as a parent, and then doing a kind of double speak or a double think, and interpreting them then as not what you want, but as somehow what the baby needs. That's really I think where the problem lies.

Kevin Marsh
In the sentimental mythology of our society, children hold a high place. In practice, we often find their needs to be in conflict with our own. We see their care not as a precious responsibility which enlarges our own humanity, but as a problem for which institutional solutions must be devised. The care of people, particularly those sometimes maddening people we call children, become secondary to our participation in the all important activities of production and consumption. Both in the way we treat parents and in the way we pay their substitutes in day care centres, we reveal our true belief that the care of young children is menial and unfulfilling work.

Penelope Leach
Only those who feel cared for themselves can very easily care for others. And this is I suppose the prime reason why I wrote Who Cares?, why I got so angry for mothers. Because if nobody cares for them, if they feel uncared for, whether in the sense of having been uncared for as children or in the sense of society not caring, not noticing them, not caring what they do -- how can they be expected to pour out this kind of warm sensitive responsive caring on their children hour after hour and day after day?

Kevin Marsh
Tonight on Ideas we present the second program

in our series The World of the Child by David Cayley.

David Cayley
The American obstetrician, Herbert Ratner, once described the situation of the newborn baby as "a womb with a view." We begin our lives in virtual symbiosis with our mothers, and only gradually do we venture beyond the reach of her arms. The first three years of life comprise what the psychoanalyst Margaret Moller calls "the psychological birth of the self," and during those years we remain both vulnerable and dependent.

The question I want to pose in this program is whether we are allowing social and economic forces to conspire against our children by forcing them out of this dependence too soon. In Canada, as of 1979, over 45 per cent of women with children under 3 were in some sort of paid employment, and demands now being heard for a universal day care system are aimed at enabling all women to bear children without any prolonged interruption of their working lives. I seriously question whether such a system would be in the interests of young children or of many parents. There are, of course, many families for whom there is currently no choice in the matter of day care. These may be single parent families or families in which both parents must work, just for subsistence. But for society as a whole, and for many individual families, there is a choice, and this choice needs to be faced squarely and without rationalization.

Dr. Elliott Barker is a forensic psychiatrist and the founder of the Canadian Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children.

Elliott Barker
The question that ought to be asked that isn't, is: What's the best for the child? What we get is this mealy-mouthed statements of "Well, I've got rights too." Sure you have rights as an adult, but when you bring an infant along, then I think the question has to be, while that infant is clearly helpless, clearly under your control, and clearly vulnerable for the rest of his life for what you're going to do to it, you have a very serious obligation to ask yourself: What is in the interest of the baby, not my interest, for however many years? They are making day care arrangements not for infants. Nobody is setting up day care because they think it's the best thing for infants -- at all. They're saying it's the easiest, best compromise. If I'm not happy as a mother, then the baby . . . all these rationalizations. Show me a place where they're saying "I now believe that this kind of group care is absolutely the best thing for this infant, in terms of his developing a capacity for trust and for empathy and affection down the line." Then I'll rush and put my next kid in it. But they're not anywhere saying that -- anywhere!

David Cayley
Elliott Barker refers here mainly to infants. For slightly older children, say in the range of 2 to 4, the matter is somewhat different. In the case of these children, distinct advantages are being claimed for daycares and other preschool institutions. The field of early childhood education has expanded very rapidly since the 1960s, and the idea that children really need professional developmental and educational services in early childhood has been widely accepted. The arguments in favour of day care have also been bolstered by a number of studies purporting to show that good day care does no observable harm.

One of the best known of these studies was by Jerome Kagan and a number of colleagues from Harvard, where Kagan is a professor of developmental psychology. I asked him about his study, and he prefaced his reply with an important proviso on the usefulness of scientific research in this area.

Jerome Kagan
Unfortunately, for reasons I accept and believe in -- ethical reasons -- one cannot do experiments on human beings on important issues. Our conclusions are very limited in their validity. We cannot randomly assign children to groups. Therefore the wise citizen who is trying to use facts to make decisions should view most pychological conclusions with great caution. I didn't say ignore them, I didn't say snicker at them -- just view them with great caution, because one cannot do experiments on human beings the way you can on fruit flies. That's right! Our conclusion about day care was very limited and constrained. It said: If a day care centre is good -- good means only two or three infants to one caretaker, and maybe no more than three or four preschool children to one caretaker; the caretaker is a good caretaker, nurturant, likes children; the caretaker and the staff share the values of the family, and it's not too crowded, and they stimulate language and